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Notes on Anti-Christian Propaganda in the Mamlūk Empire

By M. PERLMANN

I

THE Mamlūk empire contributed decisively to the crushing of the Copt element in Egypt.¹ Nevertheless, the public offices and the offices of the management of the estates of the emirs, were full of Coptic scribes, who often drew upon themselves the hatred of the population, and became the scapegoats when popular passions ran high.² The Jihād spirit of the closing stages of the struggle against the Crusader and the Mongols also played its part in creating agitation against the Christians. It is instructive to find that after about 1250 the tide of theological polemical literature against Christians and Christianity rose to its highest.³ These movements were fostered with the express purpose of whipping up popular antagonism. Speeches, pamphlets, *fatwas* were used to stir the people in the struggle against the Copts, and in particular those holding office.⁴

The historians Makrīzī and Ibn Taghrī Birdī do not mince words on the subject, but make open complaint of the Coptic "domination".

Of speeches we have two *khutbas* of the year 700 A.H.⁵ The brochure

¹ G. Wiet in *EI.*, ii, 996 seq., s.v. *Ḳibṭ*.

² G. Weil, *Gesch. d. Abbass.*, i, 368-9; Wiet, *Hist. de la nation Eg.*, iv, 395. *Khīṭaṭ*, i, 69; Baibars Jāshangīr was a chief ḍimmī-baiter in 701 A.H. But a Christian managed his affairs. *Istaulā 'alā jamī' umūrihi, kamā hiya 'ādat mulūk miṣr wa-umarā'-hā min al atrāk fi-l-inḳiyād li-kuttābihim min al-ḳibṭ*. Both Christian Copts and such as pretend to be Moslems are referred to. Sometimes, the outbreaks would sweep over the other Ḍimmīs (Jews, Karaites), too. In 721, "nothing was said of the Jews" (*Khīṭ.*, ii, 516). But Joseph Sambary (wrote in 1673) accuses the Christians of having involved the Jews in the calamity of the year 700. "The accursed Christians were too extravagant, used to walk with a proud gait, dress in silk attire . . . ride on horseback like the Muslim emirs, passing *Azhar* on horseback. They also had built many churches" (Neubauer, *Med. Jew. Chron.*, 1887, pp. 135-6).

³ Especially on account of the negotiations for a Christian-Mongol alliance. The war against the Mongols is jihād (658 H., *Sulūk*, i, 429). In 707 a decree was read in Damascus on fighting the Mongols and the Christian scribes. *Cat. Leyden*, i, 153-4.

⁴ It remains to connect these outbreaks of the populace with other movements of that time, as treated by A. N. Poliak in *REI.*, viii., 251 ff. It is not clear how he arrives at the conclusion (pp. 269 f.) that there were almost no outbreaks against minorities.

⁵ Zettersteen, *Beiträge z. Gesch. d. Mamlukensultane*, pp. 84 seq.

of Sa'id b. Ḥasan is apparently connected with the events of 721 A.H.¹ Probably that is the time of the incisive pamphlet by Ghāzī al Wāsiṭī.² Around about the same time *fatwas*, as well as major works of Ibn Taymiya, contributed to the fomentation of hate against Christians.³ The year 740 produced a framed-up trial of Christians in the Mamlūk state, though not in Egypt; the charge of incendiarism too was brought against them once more, this time in Damascus. The extorted "confession" and a poem describing the event have come down to us.⁴ It is within this compass that we have to place the *fatwa* of Ibn an-Nakḡāsh, written in 757/1357, in connection with a wave of persecution and the question of demolishing churches.⁵

Another tract of the same kind, as yet unpublished, was evidently written about that time by Jamāl ad-Dīn Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥīm b. al-Ḥasan al-Umawī al-Ḳurashī al-Asnawī.⁶ A review of it in connection with the other documents referred to is offered here.

II

Born in Asna in 704, in 721 Asnawī came to Cairo, where he lived as a proficient student of law and philology. His teacher told him that he had never before granted the title of shaykh to one so young.⁷

Asnawī then went in for teaching, e.g. *ḥadīth*, in several mosques.⁸

He is said to have been a very good teacher, and most painstaking with beginners; and he was esteemed as a man of noble character. Later he became a "man of the pen", in the administration. He served as *wakīl* in the Treasury, then as *muḥtasib* of Cairo.⁹ But after some conflict with the vizier, Ibn Kazwīna,¹⁰ he resigned in 762, after which he devoted himself exclusively to teaching and writing.

We notice that the posts he held were of the kind which demanded

¹ Goldziher, *Rev. d. Et. Juives*, 30. Weston, *JAOS.*, 24.

² Ed. Gottheil, *JAOS.*, 41.

³ Schreiner, *ZDMG.*, lii, p. 559; *REJ.*, 32, pp. 212 ff.; E. Fritsch, *Islam u Christ.*, pp. 25 ff.

⁴ *Cat. Leyden*, i, 154-8.

⁵ Belin, *JA.*, 1851-2.

⁶ *GAL.*, ii, 90-1 and suppl.; Sarkis, 445-6.

⁷ Suyūṭī, *Bughya*, p. 304.

⁸ *Nujūm*, v, 265. On p. 119 we learn that when the emir Shaykhū appointed a reader, in 753, he fixed for him a monthly salary of 300 dirhams.

⁹ Kalk., iv, 36-7; *Khīṭ.*, i, 464, l. 6; the *muḥtasib* gets 30 dinars a month. The *Manhal* (Wiet, N., 1402) and 'Aynī (MS. B.M., Add. 22360, f. 84b) mention Asnawī's work in the *dār al-tirāz*.

¹⁰ *Nujūm*, v, 250 f.; he was in high esteem for "having done relatively little injustice". Ibn Iyās, i, 219 f.; *Manhal.*, p. 291.

that the holder be a person of good repute, probity, and possessed of sound theological training. It would seem to have been at about this time that he became the head of the Shāfi'ites of Egypt.

He died suddenly on the 28th of Jumada I, in 772 (September, 1370), at the age of about 68.¹ The day of his burial in a *turba* near the *makābir šūfīya* was a "memorable day". A lengthy elegy on him is quoted by Suyūṭī.² From various sources we have a list of his works: casuistic legal works; commentaries on standard books of law; philology, poetry. Some of them were much in vogue and were commented upon a century later. His course on jurisprudence, *Tamhūd fī tanzīl al-furū' 'alā-l-uṣūl*, was so much appreciated that a Ḥanafite author set out to accomplish something like it for his own *madhhab*. One gets the impression, however, of the usual production of text-books and commentaries worked out in the course of academic routine.³

III

His pamphlet against the Christian scribes is contained in the British Museum MS. Or. 11581, fol. 6-14.⁴ The eighteen pages are written in a crude hand, with frequent omissions of diacritical points, 14-15 cc. The tract is entitled: "An earnest appeal on the employment of the *Dimmis*," *Al-kalimāt al-muhimma fī mubāsharat ahl ad-dimma*.⁵

There is no indication as to the date on which the tract was written.

¹ Ibn 'Imād, *Shadārāt ad-dahab*, vi, 223-4.

² Ḥusn, i, 242 ff. Here with reference to his native town a *jeu de mots* occurs (p. 244): *wa-baldatuhu Asnā maḥallan wa-maḥtidan wa-manziluhu fī-l-khuldi asnā-l-manāzili*.

³ Ḥājī Khalifa, vi, 447. *GAL*. The MS. of Ibn Kāḍī Shuhba gives the date of the writing of most of his works.

⁴ Registered in Steinschneider's *Pol. Lit.*, n. 82.

⁵ Another copy is extant in Tunis and is entitled *Risāla fī 'adm istikhdam ahl ad-dimma wa 'adm tauliyatihim al-muslimin* (*GAL*., Supp. ii, 107). Ḥājī Khalifa quotes the title in a different form (vi, 354): *Naṣīhat ūlī-al-albāb fī man' istikhdam an-naṣārā*. But he adds that some call it: "*Al-intiṣārāt al-Islamiya*." Again, Suyūṭī mentions another title: *ar-Riyāsa an-Nāṣiriya fī-r-radd 'alā man yu'azzim ahl ad-dimma wastakhdamahum alā-l-nuslimin* (*Ḥusn*, i, 242). This rather bewildering variety of titles seems to be as old as the tract itself. At any rate, Samhūdī wrote as early as 886 that he had perused the tract which some people called *Intiṣārāt*, etc., whilst a disciple of the author inscribed it *Naṣīhat*, etc. Although the author had not cared at all about a title, he nevertheless, after having seen the suggested title, approved of it (*Wafā al-wafā*, i, 466). From Ḥājī Khalifa we learn that Suyūṭī prepared an abridgment of the tract entitled *Jahd al-Karīha fī tajrīd an-Naṣīha*.

The text mentions events of 749. It must then be attributed to the last twenty years of the author's life. It seems safe enough to assume that it was written within the years 755 and 760, when under aṣ-Ṣāliḥ Ṣāliḥ and an-Nāṣir Ḥasan there was a violent campaign against the Christian scribes. These are also the years during which the author was in close touch with public affairs, held public office, and in particular had frequent contact with civil servants of the Christian faith.

IV

Asnawī starts with Kuranic quotations, and cites standard anecdotes illustrating the theme, to prove the enmity of the Christians towards the Muslims, and that it is obligatory to reciprocate with like sentiments.¹

On top of his arguments on the subject of the *Ḍimmīs* he offers a word of advice. He says that it is generally held by all good Muslims that the *Ḍimmīs* should be subject to certain inviolable and irrevocable laws. Unfortunately, however, there has of late been a good deal of laxity, although the creed of Allah is as firm and strong as ever, and the powers that be are doing their utmost to maintain the creed, by assisting scholars and laying down courses of study.

It is this laxity which is accountable for the *Ḍimmīs* riding on horseback, after the manner practised by Muslims. By so doing they think to deceive the Muslims, so that they may secure such employment as would not be offered to anyone who dared not ride after that fashion. But it is unlawful to employ them—that is the consensus of opinion amongst Muslims. Moreover, *‘ulamā* say that a *ḍimmī* cannot be a *ṣairafī* in the treasury, since his evidence cannot be accepted on the goodness or badness of a coin; for, if his decision was accepted, it would mean admitting the *ḍimmī* to some elevation. So if a *ḍimmī* may not be employed even as a mere technical assistant, then how much more unlawful is it to employ him in state service contrary to the plain letter of the law? In Egypt this has become a veritable plague.

“Strangely enough, no country, either in the East or West, will recognize the appointment of *ḍimmīs* in the management of the affairs of Muslims, Egypt being the only exception. By God, how strange! What is wrong with this country, of all Muslim lands? Is it not the greatest Muslim country, the richest in population and knowledge?

¹ E.g. the “*māt an-Naṣrānī*” story.

Now the employment of unbelievers brings great evils and appalling conditions, such as one would not wish for his enemy, much less should Muslims wish them to come upon the community of Muḥammad. The Copts declare that this country still belongs to them, and that the Muslims evicted them from it unlawfully. Then they often steal as much as they can from the state treasury, in the belief that they are not doing wrong. As to the possibility of confiscation and punishment, torture, they hold that the chances of these happening to them are about equal to that of falling sick; that is to say, sickness does sometimes come upon a man, but is not likely to be frequent.

They will deposit those funds in churches and monasteries, and other such institutions of the unbelievers; for they hold that so long as they, the Copts, are successful they are more entitled to these funds than are the Muslims. When they are put to torture they urge one another to bear the agony with fortitude, and display steadfastness. When they are compelled to pay they bring to light the smallest possible sum, hand over a portion of it, and pay some of it away in bribes until they are set free. Now, is it right to put in charge of public affairs people with such beliefs and capable of such acts? Moreover, they will appropriate much of the property of the Muslims, the land which is a source of income to the Sultan, or the fiefs of the emirs and the troops, as well as many of the endowments for poor Muslims, e.g. the town of Nestru, and others, taking it for themselves, their churches, and monasteries despite its being forbidden to transfer anything of that kind into their own hands. Whosoever, being able to do so, refrains from interfering, thus allowing them to continue to steal and to retain all that is in their power, he is responsible for it in this world, and will have to render account for it on the day of resurrection."

This is the first list of accusations :—

- (1) Claiming the land of Egypt as their own ;
- (2) Deceiving the Muslims, their state in the first place ;
- (3) Appropriating lands, even *wakf* lands, to the benefit of Christian owners, private persons, or church bodies.

The most striking is the first. Can we believe that such a claim, even as an argument in a dispute, was made? Was it openly avowed? This is not the only instance of this claim. There is a story to the effect that in the days of the Fatimid caliph al-Āmir, the recluse ar-Rāhib practically became vizier, and on one occasion revealed his

thoughts before an audience of officials. The following is the version of *Ḳalkaṣhaṇḍī*:—"Our labours and the taxes we pay make us the owners of this land, which the Muslims took from us by force; whatever we do in their despite is but just retaliation for what they have done to us; nay, it is as nothing compared with the death of our chiefs and kings, slain in the days of the Muslim conquest. Therefore, whatever we appropriate of the wealth of the Muslims, and of their kings and caliphs, is no more than our due, since it is merely a portion of what is owing to us from them."

Then he recited:—

"A noble girl, they robbed her of her mother, and humiliated her by treading upon her with their feet;

Then they set her up as a ruler over them. But beware when your enemy becomes ruler."¹

The same note is struck in another work (B.M. Or. 23293) against Christian officials², where too, as in the *fatwa* of Ibn al-Naḳḱāsh,³ the story of the "accursed monk" is told; his speech is in different words but in the same spirit as that of *Ḳalkaṣhaṇḍī*.

The verses recur without the story in Ghāzī al-Wāsiṭī's "Answer to the *ḍimmīs*".⁴

We seem to have here a repetition of the assertion ascribed to the Copts. The subject was one which caused irritation in mediæval Egypt. To whom, it was asked, does the country belong? Was it conquered or taken over by treaty? What should be the attitude towards the Copts, the aborigines of Egypt?

A Muslim account of Egypt is sure to contain a chapter on the question whether the country had been occupied by force or by treaty.

The Copts were concerned with inventing and circulating stories which told in their favour. And we find such stories as early as the *Sīra* and Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam's *History of the Conquest of Egypt*. The Prophet is said to have urged the Muslims to treat the Copts kindly; for the Muslims would find them of great help against the enemy. On his death-bed the Prophet thinks of the Copts, and warns the

¹ *Ḳalk.*, xiii, 369 f. Wiet, *Hist.*, iv, 262 ff. Lane-Poole, Najāḥ Abū Kannā became tax-farmer (*dāmin*) in 1126 and was beaten to death after four years of service.

² B.M. Or. 23293, fol. 190b.

³ *JA.*, 1851, p. 461.

⁴ *JAOS.*, 41, pp. 383-457. Here 'Amr b. al-Āṣ saw in his dream Christians reading the verses. He awoke frightened, and dismissed the Christian scribes. Gottheil remarks on this his translation of the verses: "I am told these are popular verses sung over the wine-cups. The vine is apostrophized as a girl, and sung to as such."

unbelievers that they must not hurt them. The Copts, it is generally accepted, are not only *ḍimma* but also *raḥim*, kith and kin ; for Ismā'il's mother, Hagar, was an Egyptian ; and three prophets, Abraham, Joseph, and the Apostle, had Egyptian wives. The conquest was by treaty.

The enmity evinced towards the Copts is in direct contrast to the preceding attitude. It is held that their country is merely an enemy territory occupied by a people that can be regarded as slaves, to be made use of when any such are wanted.¹ Further, it is asserted that the Copts abuse their offices when they want to rid themselves of the restrictions imposed on *ḍimmīs*, or escape from the humiliations cast upon them and so raise their own status. They strain themselves to live up to the Muslims. And they even assume a proud bearing. All this they achieve by concentrating their ill-gotten wealth into their own coffers, and transferring much of it to *wakfs* of their churches. What is most appalling is their general bearing, vengeful cynicism towards the Muslim community and its affairs. The same points are brought forward in the edict of al-Malik as-Ṣāliḥ Ṣāliḥ of 755 A.H.²

“Let them not lay hands on the *mawāt* lands of the Muslims or any other land, nor lay claim to it for a cell or a church or monastery, etc.”

“They may not buy a Muslim slave, male or female ; nor one taken prisoner by Muslims ; nor one who is of Muslim origin. They may not convert a slave to Judaism or Christianity. . . . They may not buy any of the imported slaves. . . .”

The same issue is discussed in Asnawī's tract. “They buy Muslim slaves from the Turks and others, make them Christians, and nobody can stop them.”

The author of the above-mentioned tract against the Christian scribes thus explains his motives in writing it : —

- (1) Concern for Muslim property ;
- (2) Devotion to the regime ;
- (3) Indignation on seeing the wealth, the money, and estates accumulated by these Copts which they acquired as officials, or, rather, acquired by abusing their position.

¹ *Sīra*, p. 3 : ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, pp. 2–4, 84–90. The choice is free (89, ll. 14–151) : to go over to the *umma* or to become *ḍimma*.

² *Kalk.*, xiii, 378 seq. Now L. A. Mayer in *Sefer Magnes*, 1938, pp. 161 seq.

It is held to be quite normal that the Christian should hate the Muslim. He is always on the look-out for an opportunity to betray him.

“Employing them in financial affairs means for the Christians raising their status, imposing them upon Muslims, upholding them so that they despise the Muslims, and turn the Muslims into servants. . . . All that, being the result of their religious hatred, etc.”

That is the road to treason. *Ḳalkashandi* says :—

“The first qualification of a scribe is Islam . . . so that he may be relied upon in what he writes or dictates as well as in what he omits ; for he is the organ (*lisān*) of the Government. . . . So not one of the unbelievers should be placed in office ; for he will serve as a spy to the unbelievers on Muslims to discover their secrets, and in this way the enemy will get to know confidential information, e.g. the state of their treasuries, number of troops and men.”¹

The diploma of appointment of a Syrian patriarch contains a warning against harbouring men from abroad, and holding secret correspondence with foreign potentates.² Much earlier, aṣ-Ṣairafī, writing in the time of the crusades, demands : A scribe must be a Muslim . . . especially in the present time, so that secrets may not leak out, which is a serious danger, for the enemy stands so near.³

In a violent rhymed sermon of the year 700 the preacher insists :—

“By God, they are the source of all misfortune and treason. It is because of them that strangers beset us. While you are trying to destroy the enemy’s country, they are building here in safety a country of their own. And our major secrets will leak out to the foe through them.”⁴

At times these accusations were accompanied by evidence. When in 658 A.H. Hulāgū’s army took Damascus, the Christians rejoiced in his victory. They abused the Muslims, sprinkled them and the mosques with wine, and cried that the true faith is victorious.⁵ Whilst the foreign policy of these scribes contains menaces of treachery, their home policy consists in humiliating and oppressing the Muslims. They facilitate the erection of a church, or remissions in the payment of the poll tax ; but when a Muslim wishes to erect a mosque, or when a Christian wishes to become a Muslim, they raise difficulties.⁶ Moslems are compelled to run in their

¹ *Kalk.*, i, 61-2.

² *Ibid.*, xii, 427.

³ *Ḳanūn diwān ar-rasā’il*, pp. 95-6.

⁴ Zettersteen, p. 88.

⁵ *Ṣulūk*, 425. 432, Wāsiṭī also dwells on the case.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

train, on foot.¹ The scribes appropriate goods and even estates, and nobody dares to utter a word against them, with the result that the Christians can boast of possessing luxuries, palaces, horses, and fine clothes. Their contempt for Muslims is so deep-rooted that it is patent even in the posterity of those who had embraced Islam.²

Asnawī also holds the Christians responsible for the spread of moral laxity, for wine drinking, seduction of Muslim women, etc. Their influence starts when they are in the retinue of an emir. They gradually worm their way into his household, etc. Asnawī tells of a sharif who got into trouble for kissing the hand of a Christian and defended himself by saying: ‘I could not find any other way. I had no choice in the matter; for he is an official in a department where I had some business to transact. My case had been sent on to him, and I had to try and influence him in my favour; or he might harm me and my family. I am a poor man. I have no resources beyond those that lie in his hands. So I did it, out of necessity. My guilt rests upon him who appointed the Christian.’³ “Only a few days later God delivered us, brought us the great joy of a decree forbidding their employment.”

The haughty bearing of a Christian scribe sometimes became the pretext for an anti-Christian agitation, or even state intervention, in the form of a renewal of the restrictions laid down for *ḍimmīs*.

We have seen, then, that the principal accusations against the *ḍimmīs* were that they were sly, anti-Muslim, treacherous, that they accumulated wealth by dishonest practices, and that they demoralized the administration of the state and the fiefs.⁴ Another accusation has already been referred to. And here is what Asnawī has to say specifically on it:—

“This feature has become so appalling an evil that they have the effrontery to encroach on the endowments and funds of the mosques . . . by prevailing upon people to withhold payment. By their manipulations they make it appear that certain lands and properties are of little or no value; and when they have convinced Muslims of this they appropriate the lands and properties. That is why so many old mosques are now fallen into decay.

¹ Zett., p. 88.

² *Khīṭat*, ii, 511.

³ Strict theologians developed a general aversion and opposition to bowing to human beings whatever their position. Goldziher, *RHR.*, 1887, pp. 157 seq.

⁴ *Khīṭ.*, i, 90, ll. 6 ff., on *makr al-aḳbāt*.

“Taking advantage of their connection with the Sultan, the emirs, and the administration, they make every effort to have churches and monasteries erected, and to restore those that have become dilapidated.

“Now the land of Egypt was conquered by force by the Companions of the Prophet; and where conquest by force takes place no ancient church can be allowed to remain, to say nothing of the restoration of such as have fallen into decay, or the erection of new.

“Great cunning to bring these things to pass has been displayed frequently by the officials employed from amongst them, more particularly where the official happened to be an Armenian, recently converted to Islam. . . . But consider the character of a man who connives at the erection of buildings where the enemies of God and the Apostle will foregather. . . .”¹

V

Some of the accusations definitely refer to historic events. The Christians are notorious for their attempts at incendiarism, e.g. of mosques.

“They display great cunning in their schemes to burn down mosques, many of which have been destroyed in this way, and many men, women, and children burnt to death. . . . Many of the buildings burnt down by them are in ruins to this day.”

Cases of incendiarism by Christians are then enumerated. Asnawī apparently wished to confine himself to those cases which occurred during his own lifetime. He does not mention the earlier anti-Christian campaigns under the Mamlūks (658, 663, 678, 682, 700),² but starts his list with the events of 721, which he may have witnessed when he arrived in Cairo, a lad of seventeen. At least he must have heard them talked about a few months after they had taken place; for the atmosphere was still tense with excitement. Yet already in 700 the technique of propaganda had been well developed.

An ambassador from the Maghreb was an amazed witness of a Christian official's insolence. He asked himself: “How can Muslims

¹ Cf. R. Gottheil, *Dhimmis and Moslems in Egypt (Old Test.) and Sem. St. in mem. of W. R. Harper*, ii, Chicago, 1908); A. S. Tritton, *The Caliphs and their non-Moslem subjects*, ch. iii; M. Schreiner, *ZDMG.*, 45.

² *Khiṭ.*, ii, 497 f.; *Sulūk*, i, 425, 429, 432, 535, 667 f.

win a war if at home they have in their midst the infidels at the head of the state ? ” This was the origin of an outburst.¹

There was a struggle between factions of *fukahā*. Shaykh Najm ad-Dīn Aḥmad b. Rif‘a fulminated against churches and synagogues, and represented the views of the populace, whilst Ibn Daḳīḳ, *kāḏī-l-kuḏāt*, taking the opposite side, published a *fatwa* declaring that it was unlawful to destroy churches unless and until proof was forthcoming that the buildings were post-Islamic.²

We have two splendid diatribes in rhymed prose against Christians, especially officials, which were delivered at that time. They display a clever technique of the art of propaganda. They inspire terror with their pictures of future punishment ; exaggerate grossly the mischief they are out to remove ; rouse religious fervour to its highest pitch, and pile up a terrifying list of accusations of treachery, exploitation, and moral depravity. They conclude with a shrill call to action :—

“ Who is present let him warn his neighbours and relatives ; whoso will heed, let him rouse those who are not present so that they pay heed to the Muslim call.”

Then follows the appeal to mob-passion : “ O God, assist those who crush them, and crush those who assist them ! ”

The pamphlets of Sa‘īd b. Ḥasan, a Jewish convert, as also probably some *fatwas* of Ibn Taymīya, treat of those events.

Again in 721 there were outbreaks of fire, denunciations, confessions, the discovery of a plot by monks and their torture. We also obtain a glimpse of what appears to be a genuine popular movement which had been in existence for months, with most carefully prepared provocations and demonstrations, slogans and calls to direct action. Clashes with the police took place, and the authorities were stoned, amongst them the *kāḏī* who was defending the Christians. A high official explains that these occurrences were entirely due to the hatred of the Christian scribes. The emirs, realizing that the tension was running too high, advised that no attempts be made to quell the outburst. “ It is certainly God’s will.” The Sultan found himself in a dilemma. On the one hand he was afraid of antagonizing the masses ; on the other he was afraid of

¹ *Sulūk*, 909–12 ; Quatremère, ii, 2, pp. 177 seq. ; *Khit.*, ii, 498 ; *Ḳalk.*, 13, pp. 377 f.

² Steinschneider, nn. 41, 85, 57d.

anarchy. The result was that he decided to leave the Christians to the tender mercies of their persecutors for a time.¹

Another case of incendiarism, says Asnawī, was discovered in Damascus in the year 740. The Christians had set the Umayyad mosque on fire; again they confessed. Asnawī refers to a series of fires which damaged a minaret and some of the endowments belonging to the mosque. A Christian confessed under torture, and supplied the authorities (under Tankiz) with the material that had been searched for. We still have a record of the confrontation of that Christian with the notables of his community. It is the story of a secret meeting of several Christians of the administrations, headed by two monks who were expert incendiaries, and who came from Byzantium a little while before. A plan of campaign was drawn up. The monks set about carrying them out. They prepared seven bombs (*ka'kāt*) filled with *barūda*, naphtha, and coal-dust, etc. These they "planted", and a series of fires broke out. Messages were sent, bribes distributed, communication with officials of other towns maintained. There is also a poem describing the event. Even the texts of the decisions of the *kādīs* of Damascus have been handed down to us. They discuss whether or no the fires may be regarded as a violation of the "treaty" which might necessitate its denunciation, and what was the punishment, fine or banishment.²

A case of incendiarism also occurred at about the beginning of 'ām *al-fanā*, the year of extermination, the year of the black death, 749. Christians were caught and confessed. But they bribed some of the officials, who allowed them to escape, whilst a noble sharīf would be put to torture on such charges.

On the other hand Asnawī makes no mention of another wave of anti-Christian agitation which swept over the state in his own time. The last he mentions is that of the year of the black death, 749. He omits the events of the fifties of the fourteenth century, with their outstanding incidents in 755 and 759 A.H.

This fact, joined with the fact that there is much in common between the questions raised in those years and the events mentioned by Asnawī in his pamphlet, leads us to the conclusion that the pamphlet was probably written during the campaign of those years,

¹ Tritton, ch. 4; Wiet, 484 ff.

² *Cat. Leyden*, i, 154-8; Zettersteen., 209; Weil, i, 361 ff. and 383 ff.; Ibn Ḥabīb, *Durrat al aslāk*, Abstracts in *Orientalia*, ii (Amst., 1846), p. 372.

and was one of its products. The course of events, however, does not seem to be very clear.¹ Ibn Taghrī Birdī has only a few words under 753. Ibn Iyās mentions the massacre of Bedouins in 754, after which “a fellah was forbidden to ride a horse, or bear arms”. And he proceeds to tell of a new decree against *ḍimmīs*, aimed especially against employing them in offices. Ḳalkāshandī brings the full text of aṣ-Ṣāliḥ’s decree of 755 against the employment of infidels in the offices either of the government or of the emirs. But the older Maḳrīzī mentions, under 755, that large crowds delivered a petition about the *ḍimmīs*. Violence broke out; churches were demolished, excepting that of the Venetians. The authorities tried to intervene, but had to withdraw. After this another decree was promulgated, which declared that it was not enough for a Christian to embrace Islam; his whole family had to do likewise; and it was made compulsory for the converts to attend prayers. The decree also changed the former law of inheritance. It laid down that a Muslim member of a Christian family, i.e. a recent convert, should not forfeit his portion, and where there was no heir the treasury and not the *ḍimmī* community was entitled to the inheritance.²

In another passage Maḳrīzī states:—

“The Muslims agitated against the Christians. Lists were drawn up of those lands in Egypt which had become *wakf* of Christian churches and monasteries. The scribes of the emirs were obliged to supply those lists to the *ḍiẓwān al-aḥbās*. When they were completed, they comprised 25,000 *faddān*, all church and monastery endowments. These were offered to the higher emirs who managed the affairs in the days of al-malik aṣ-Ṣāliḥ Ṣāliḥ; that is to Shaykhū al ‘Umārī, Sarghitmish, and Ṭāz. It was decided that those estates should be granted to the emirs in addition to their fiefs. And the Christians were humiliated, as was but fitting. Several of their churches were demolished.” ‘Aynī knows of the general decree against employment of infidels (*mubāshara*) in Rejeb 755.

In these passages we find mentioned the date 755 and the name of aṣ-Ṣāliḥ.

But Ibn Iyās gives a similar account of the confiscation of church estates under 759. Memoranda were submitted to the emir Sarghitmish

¹ *Nujūm*, v, 133; Ibn Iyās, i, 200 f.; Ḳalk., xiii, 378; Quatremère, *Mémoires*, ii, 254.

² Schreiner, *REJ.*, 29.

by the *ḏīwān al-aḥbās*, stating the value of the churches and monasteries, and it was found that there were 25,000 *faddān* in Christian hands. On learning this Sarghitmish flew into a rage. He went up to the citadel to consult with the sultan (al-malik an-Nāṣir Ḥasan II, 1354–1361), who decreed that this land be taken from the Christians. He also drew up *murabba'āt* bestowing the Christian lands upon the emirs, in addition to their fiefs. Steps were taken to counteract the evil influence of the Christians' morals on the Muslims. The solemn affirmation of the restrictions, published by Gottheil, is dated 752.

Connected with the events of 754 there is the story of the strange fate of a Karaite private secretary of Damascus, who was forced to embrace Islam and undertake the pilgrimage. He told of the vicissitudes of his life in Hebrew poems.¹

Lastly, the *fatwa* of an-Nakḥāsh against the Christians was written in 759/1357–8. Its essential points are: Muslims cannot offer to unbelievers either friendship (*walāya*) or offices (*wilāya*); Muslims can have no other feeling but hatred for unbelievers.

Here, too, we learn of another factor which served to fan the wrath of the *fuḳahā* against the Christians; it is that the Franks who had come to live in Egypt for business reasons had formed themselves into a community which could not be treated on the same level as the native Christian community. They came under treaty and did not pay the poll-tax; "their women were considered as being like ours," etc. But an *amān* cannot be issued for a period beyond one year.

Thus it will appear that there was a series of restrictive measures, some of them new (confiscation of church lands, the imposition of the Muslim laws of inheritance) in the fifties of the eighth century A.H.; and that we still possess some of the literature to which these restrictive measures gave occasion, amongst them—probably—Asnawī's pamphlet.

VI

Asnawī also refers to a Christian plot to blow up Muḥammed's tomb in Medina.

One night, in a restless sleep, the sultan Nūr ad-Dīn saw in a vision the Prophet pointing to two brown men. This dream was repeated three times. The sultan consulted with the vizier Jamāl ad-Dīn al-Mauṣilī, who interpreted the dream as meaning that the

¹ J. Mann, *Texts and Studies*, ii, 201 seq.

sultan should go to Medina. They set out together, and when they arrived the prince made it known that he would distribute money. But the men whom he had seen in the dream did not appear, nor had he any further inspiration. He then insisted that every inhabitant of the city should come up before him. At last he discovered that there were two men who had failed to show themselves; they explained that they were not in need of assistance, but themselves distributed large sums of money in alms.

The two men, rich pilgrims from the Maghreb, were brought before the sultan. He instantly recognized them, nor was he misled by the fact that they were held in high esteem. He visited their house, which was near the tomb, and there he discovered many books (on explosives? *fī-r-raḡā'ik*), and after further search, he discovered a secret place under a rug.

The two Maghrebites were beaten until they confessed that they had come to the city as Christian emissaries to accomplish a terrible plan.

On hearing the confession the sultan realized how great had been the danger which threatened Islam; and he wept and ordered the two men to be beheaded. He then forbade the employment of Christians in state service in Syria, Egypt, and Diyārbakr.

This story, a kind of "Protocols of the Elders of Zion", was widely diffused. Samhūdī, in his *History of Medina*, quotes it from Asnawī's pamphlet, but has had it from other sources, too, with some variations, as well as the date 557.

But Samhūdī expressed some doubts regarding its authenticity. "But, strangely, I have not come across this story, although it is of a very serious character, in the works of Nūr ad-Dīn's biographers." And he knew of other stories reminiscent of this one, which seemed to him to be spurious.¹

Some restoration work was carried out in 557/1162 by Nūr ad-Dīn, and around the story of this work, on the pattern of the Christian incendiarism, that other story seems to have been woven.

Asnawī quotes the case of Saladin. Under the pressure of circumstances he decided to discontinue employing Christians, but to continue, at least temporarily, to raise funds by *mukūs*, unlawful taxation. But *ḡaḏī* Muḡyī ad-Dīn b. az-Zangī advised the abolition

¹ Yalbugā as-Sālimī (d. 811) once told Maḡrīzī that as vizier, he knew that through *mukūs* the Copts rob Egypt of seventy thousand dihams daily.

of the *mukūs*, saying that God would help the believers. His advice was accepted and God helped them and the true faith prevailed.

Wāsiṭī condemns the official as a parasite. The manipulations (*istīlāh*) of the Christian clerk make it impossible for others than himself to follow the records, and make it necessary to retain him.¹

VII

As the pressure that was brought to bear upon them was intensified, more and more Copts embraced Islam. But far from solving the problem this conversion created a new one, itself a burning question—a hotbed of suspicion, distrust, and mockery. As a rule, the Muslim Copt still adhered closely to his own people, and in many ways kept apart from the Muslims; whilst to the Muslim he remained what he had been, “*al-ḳibṭī al-miṣrī*”; for the change had been imposed upon him from without, and had in it little of personal conviction.²

The Muslim Copt was, in the eyes of the Muslims, a representative of the hated brain-trust which aimed at keeping the country in the hollow of its hand. Islam was utilized as a means to that end and was nothing but hypocrisy.

It was usual for one member only of a family to embrace Islam; the others remained Christians. It rarely happened that he severed his connection with Christians and became a good Muslim.³ It is only external pressure, laws prohibiting the employment of Christians, and the lust for power which will force a Copt to embrace Islam.⁴ And such are more antagonistic towards Muslims than are the other Copts. “The contemptible amongst them, thanks to his having turned Muslim, would with malice humiliate the Muslims to an extent impossible to him whilst he was a Christian. Indeed, as one wrote:—

“The unbelievers turned Muslim at the point of the sword

“If left alone they are transgressors.

“They saved their skin and goods;

“They are safe, *Sālimūn*, but no *muslimūn*.”⁵

The tract against the employment of *ḍimmīs* which has been referred to elsewhere, has a chapter “Concerning the reason why,

¹ Poliak, *REI.*, 1938.

² Cf. *Nujūm*, vii, 269; vi, 823.

³ The story might have arisen under the impression made by the schemes of Renaud de Chatillon to strike at Medina (578/1183), thwarted by al-ʿĀdil, Saladin's brother. Cf. Wiet, *Hist.*, 323-4; Abū Shāma, ii, 35 ff; Samhūdī, i, 466-472.

⁴ *Sulūk*, 911: *ḥiṣān minhum ʿalā bakāʾi riyāsatihim*.

⁵ *Khīṭ*, ii, 498.

if one of them happens to embrace Islam, he becomes still baser than he was before, more treacherous, more unreliable, and more insolent". If he is in straits he repeats the creed. He goes home to his family, and explains away what he has done.

This is meat for the preacher.

"Now look at those who embraced Islam, inquire.

"Do you find them any one of them in any mosque?

"People do not talk of them, but just remain silent.

"If you say they became Muslims—where is the fruit of their Islam?

"Has any of them gone in pilgrimage to the holy house of God?

"Has any of them a pilgrim's cloak?

"Has any of them been proved to fast in Ramaḍān?

"Has any of them entered a mosque to join behind the imām?

"Or else—you say—they are not Muslims. Then why is poll-tax not exacted

"From them, humiliation not imposed on them?"¹

But who is responsible for the high place these Christian scribes occupy? The authorities. Therefore, it is but logical that the attack be turned against them. And that is actually what took place.

Sometimes the attack is vague and is aimed at the indifference of Muslims in general.

"What is this weakness which has affected Islam? Should the enemies of God and of the Apostle be allowed to rule the people?" Therefore the people must be roused out of their slumber, to stand up against the enemy of God. "Why do our theologians remain silent on that subject, our rulers inert?" And this at a time when Muslims have become a mere rabble of servitors, and eat forbidden food. The authorities tried to defend themselves. It is not our fault; for we found the Christians in the offices where they have been for generations. Kaḷkashandī knew of this plea, and knew also that Hilāl aṣ-Ṣābī was generally held up as the example of an excellent non-Muslim scribe. He explains this by stating in what way aṣ-Ṣābī differed from others. He came of a group that was small in number, devoid of fame and state, were lacking in fighters against Islam, and had no government to which they might be loyal, to the detriment of Islam.²

¹ Zett., 90 f.

² i, 63, quoting Abū-l-Faḍl aṣ-Ṣūrī.

Asnawī discloses the weakness of the argument. He says :—

“ Whosoever is capable of removing the evil must not shirk, and say : ‘ So it was before me, former generations tired of it. The consensus of Islam and the clear text of the Holy Book prove that this excuse will be of no avail.’ Subterfuge will not work. Punishment is inevitable. ‘ Of what use is it to the poor man, in whose power it lies to put an end to the evil, if on the day of resurrection his torment will be shared by someone else ? ’ ‘ Acceptance of the employment of the Christian is acceptance of their deeds.’ The sages have said : ‘ Acceptance of unbelief is in itself unbelief.’ ”

VIII

The power of the Copts as a community was crushed ; but the individual Coptic official still remained a common figure.

New exactions were imposed in 792. In 815 the poll-tax had to be paid in person under conditions of subjection and humiliation.¹

Half a century after the death of Asnawī, in 822, the Christian kingdom of Abyssinia was accused of oppressing its Muslim subjects. In connection with this accusation, the Patriarch of Egypt was summoned before the Sultan, was made to kneel, and had abuse poured out on him. And once again the decrees against employing Christians were enforced.²

The Christians tried to buy themselves off, and were assisted in their efforts by the Muslim Copts.

The annalist highly approves this act of Mu’ayyad Shaikh, and hopes it will be accepted as atonement for his transgressions.

“ For it is one of the greatest things to the glory of God, as the employment of these Christians in the bureaux of the Egyptian state is one of the greatest calamities. It causes the Christian religion to be exalted. Most Muslims have to apply to and stand before the gates of the dignitaries of state for decisions on their affairs. When a man has some business which is in the hands of the diwan of a certain chief, he is compelled to abase himself, and ingratiate himself with the official in charge of that particular diwan, whether he be a Christian or a Jew or a Samaritan. As the proverb has it : ‘ A man in need is blind ; he seeks only satisfaction.’ Thus, a man has to stand before a Christian, whilst the latter may remain seated for many hours, until he has come to a decision regarding the matter in hand, the

¹ Quatremère, *Mém.*, ii (*Sulūk*).

² *Nujūm*, vi, 398 ff., 559.

Muslim blessing him, and being more polite towards him than he would be towards a learned shaykh. Or it may be that a Muslim will kiss the hem of the official's garment, and follow him on foot, whilst the other rides on horseback until he is through with his business. As to peasants of the villages, a Christian inspector will beat them, humiliate them, and put them in chains on the pretext that he is out to save their master's money. But that is not so. What he is out for is to dominate Muslims. This it is and nothing else which befalls a Muslim prisoner in a Frank land ; only that there he is owned by his master."

The fellah is a poor man, in need, afraid of the master of the land, whom he asks for some improvement in his state, in regard to the amount of the taxes he has to pay. . . . Thus Mu'ayyad conquered Egypt anew. Many Copts realized, in their distress, that there was only one means whereby they could retain their posts, namely to embrace Islam. They could not resist the temptation. They did not want to renounce their positions. "Habit is second nature." Accordingly they pretended to have turned Muslim, repeating the creed.

Three years later the decree was renewed, again in vain. In 852 there was a special decree promulgated prohibiting Jews and Christians from practising medicine amongst Muslims.¹ And almost a century after the death of Asnawī, in 868, the decree prohibiting the employment of Christians in state offices was once again renewed. The chronicler comments sadly ² :—

"How fine it would be if it continued ; if these recurrent proclamations of prohibitions ceased, and the Copts were not getting into state offices any more. . . . So it went on for about a year, then everything was again as it had been before."

¹ *Nujūm*, vii, 160. ² *Ibid.*, 721 f.